
**SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AUTOMATING ELECTRONIC COMMERCE
TRANSACTIONS USING A VIRTUAL SHOPPING CART**

ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

A virtual shopping cart system used in the context of an Internet environment. The system provides a shopping engine capable of searching the entire WWW to analyze an unbounded population of merchants selling a heterogeneous set of items which the shopper has placed in his or her shopping cart, enables the detection of the lowest priced instances of each item from the population of merchants, enables the sale consummation directly from the shopping cart without having to visit the merchant's site, and permits the shopper to enter into the shopping cart any item that is desired without limiting the shopper to searches on an incomplete set of items.